3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

524 of the riddle. An unexpected reply or a good guess often drew applause, even if it was not the accepted correct answer.

535 857 Before it was dark, all the herd-boys joined in what they called 'drill' on the flat space where they milked the cows in front of the kraal gate. As a rule this 'drill' was practising for the *ngoma* dance which took place after harvest and was the only dance for boys and girls approved by the Ngoni rulers. Sometimes they varied this dance, practising with swift follow-my-leader manœuvres, turning, twisting, lifting sticks, knocking knobkerries together, stamping, whistling. [534] As we have said already, the Ngoni had no drums, and all the precision and rhythm in any dances or concerted movements depended on exact timing and following the leader. The accuracy and precision reached was remarkable, and represented a high degree of intense concentration and co-operation among the dancers or 'drillers', who developed an almost intuitive knowledge of what the leader was going to do next. This dancing was practised in front of the men and older youths on purpose. They criticized it freely, and sometimes, though rarely, praised the boys. More often they came forward to show them how to do it better.

233 857 For the greater part of the day the herd-boys were with the cattle. They rose before it was light, undid the kraal gate, and as dawn broke led the cattle to the river. Then they went to the grazing grounds which according to the season were near or far from the village. As the dry season advanced and the grass became poorer, they had to go farther afield to find grazing. They returned to the village about ten o'clock [234] and milked the cows and took the milk in gourds to the senior women, keeping some as their own perquisite. The cattle were driven under some trees to rest during the heat of the day, and taken to the grazing ground again about two and brought back about five, watered and put in the kraal and the gate was closed. Variations in this time-table depended on the seasons, the quality of the pasture, and on whether the herd-boys went to school or not.

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

round to protect the cow and calf, until they were strong enough to go back to the kraal.

The intricate system of ownership of cattle, including the relation between a house and a herd, and between certain herds and the spirits of former great people, was part of a herd-boy's background knowledge. He listened at the kraal gate to the men discussing questions of ownership. When a decision was taken to kill a beast, or sell one, or to transfer one or more at a marriage, or to hand over a beast in payment of a fine, the senior boys knew which group of beasts in the kraal must be driven out to be looked over in order that a selection could be made by the man concerned.

The Ngoni classified their cattle according to age, sex, colouring, size and shape of horns, whether castrated or not, whether in calf or not. Knowledge of the extensive series of names used for these 'classes' of cattle was part of a herd-boy's A.B.C. By the time he was old enough to be told to drive certain cattle out of the kraal, designated by their class, he knew exactly which ones were meant. He could also use the cattle terminology to be precise in telling an owner about a beast which had strayed or one that had a sore hoof, or one that was giving an exceptionally good or poor flow of milk.

Herd-boys learned that cattle constituted a form of wealth, not only by the numbers a man possessed and could display, but also because they were easily realizable assets. Cattle could be sold to pay taxes, debts and court fines; and to pay men working for an Ngoni owner of cotton or tobacco gardens. They learned also that since cattle could be converted into money, the men of the house owning the cattle could use the money to buy cloth. This cloth, the property of the house, was kept and looked after by the senior women, who would lend it out temporarily to young men wishing to dress up smartly to go courting or go on a visit.

In the modern forms of Nyasaland economy it was a

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

177 natural translation for Ngoni young men to become butchers
233 and dairymen, if they could apprentice themselves to a rela-
234 tive, or if their father could put up the necessary capital outlay for starting independently. This conversion of knowledge and traditional skill into a channel offering higher rewards in cash incomes found the young Ngoni adult well prepared to earn his living.

Hunting

224 There was an aura of manhood and of distinction about all forms of hunting among the Ngoni. They did it because they enjoyed it, and not seriously to augment their family's food supply. There were two main corporate forms of hunting: the chase, when hare and deer were hunted with dogs; and killing lions and leopards. The first was the pursuit of a Ngoni gentleman which no one wanted to miss during the right season; and the second was the act of warriors defending themselves and their cattle and villages from marauders.

Ngoni boys in their herding days acquired some of the
868 skills needed later for hunting with the men. They made
224 traps to catch birds from the hair of cows tails or smeared bird lime on branches. They developed great adroitness at hitting birds on the wing with knobkerries. In these pursuits, which for them were half fun, half to get bits of extra food, they were training their eye, learning to observe the habits of birds and small animals, learning to track them, and developing that combination of patience, prompt action and accuracy of aim essential to successful hunting.

Some of the Ngoni men liked to go off hunting on their own, usually those who had a gun. Fathers used to take their sons on such hunting trips, and use the opportunity to teach them how to track successfully, how to put up with hunger and thirst on long marches, how to load and fire a gun. One young man described how his father used to point out to him on such trips the birds and butterflies in the bush. On one trip his father taught him to use his muzzle-loading gun, how

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939)1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

round covered food basket, the side dishes in small covered earthenware bowls. Among the traditional Ngoni dishes learned by girls were the following:

Gruel made of cow's milk and maize flour (for young children).
Whole maize boiled with beans and round peas.
Sweet potatoes boiled, peeled and mashed with tomatoes.
Beans and finger millet flour cooked separately and then stirred together.
Pumpkins cooked with ground-nut paste.
Ground-nut flour cooked with scraps of meat.
Whole tall millet pounded with ground-nuts.
Pot-roast chicken with tomatoes, onions and ground-nuts.

In Ngoni households meat when cooked in large quantities, not just as broth made from bones and titbits, was served on a special wooden meat-dish, round or oblong with rounded ends, and supported on three sturdy legs. This meat-dish was an integral part of the equipment of every 'true Ngoni' household, and, like the French housewife's omelet pan, was after use wiped clean and polished with clarified fat. The outside of these meat-dishes was often decorated with 'poker work' designs by the maker, and such decorated and shining meat-dishes were treasured as heirlooms. Other, but rare, heirlooms were hammered brass pots with a flat bottom and turned over edge, of the pattern known in India as *dekchies*. The Ngoni women who owned them declared they had been brought by their ancestors from the south.

All the extra fat when a beast was killed was sent to the women of the 'house' in whose herd it was, and this fat was cooked until it was clarified, and then stored. Butter was made by shaking milk in a gourd, and it was also clarified for keeping. Formerly milk curds were made daily by the senior women and kept to mature in a jar before being eaten. Only in a few Ngoni households was this still done.

Beer was made on special occasions when the women had

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273 Beer drinking is one of the most important social occupations, and a considerable proportion of maize is consumed in this way. Brewing takes six days to complete, but two weeks more are required to prepare the sprouted maize that is an essential ingredient. Once brewed, the beer remains drinkable for two or three days, but the partially brewed beer, of smaller alcoholic content, is also drunk. Beer is brewed for many reasons, for working parties in the garden or housebuilding, for selling at threepence a bowl, or as often as not, just for drinking. Finger millet is used in beer making, and if available, the whole maize flour from a grinding machine, as well as the white maize flour of the village. The beer is brewed in large ten-gallon pots, then poured into smaller four-gallon pots that can be carried about, and from these ladled with a gourd into bowls or ornamental gourd cups. Four-gallon petrol tins are sometimes used instead of pots, and large enamelware mugs instead of bowls. Very rarely, beer is drunk from glasses.

VIII

233 Cattle are in the care of herdboys, whose ages range from eight to fourteen. They take the cattle out of the byres in the morning and go off with them to look for pasture. The cattle come back in the early afternoon, when the calves suck, and go off again until about five o'clock in the evening, when they are put back in the byre for the night. The calves are looked after by smaller children, and do not usually go so far away from the village as do the fully grown cattle. In the dry season, after the harvest, when there is no danger of spoiling crops, the cattle wander about very much by themselves, and the boys play or do odd jobs in the village. In these days of village schools, suitable boys are not always free to look after cattle, and in this case girls will do the herding.

234 Little use is made of the milk except occasionally for use in porridge, and for sale to Europeans. The European market also provides the only use for eggs. 235

13:Fraser M-5 (ca. 1890)1901
FR5 Ngoni FR5

888 [622] Yet the position of the old women of the village was a highly honoured one. The mother of the headman was almost more powerful than her son. And we always take good care when we enter a new village to win the kindly favour of the old grandmother first of all. Then we are sure we have found a way to the son's heart. One of the most beautiful things in our tribal life is the honour which is paid to the grey hairs of the village. The bent and helpless old men who lived through the glorious fighting [623] days, and understand all precedent and etiquette are the judges and councillors. And no case can be tried, no decision can be made, until the old men give their presence and their opinion. It is hard when the young are leaping ahead of their fathers through education to maintain this veneration for the elders. Yet it is the very backbone of the tribe. There is nothing more contemptible than an African or an Asiastic with a veneer of education who affects to despise the elders of the village. But I know no more pathetic sight than our afternoon schools where grey-haired men and women may be seen peering through faded eyes trying also to learn to read and keep abreast of the young and alert life, while the sun goes down in their eventide.

233 [181] The Ngoni were first of all a fighting people, and then a pastoral. Their land affords splendid pasture for cattle. And they take great pride in their herds. Round the cattle kraal centre all their ambitions, and highest delights, and best intelligence. They sit and watch the cattle going out in the early morning and coming in in the evening, and know every spot and colour of their beautiful animals. The quietest and most peaceful sight I know is when the sun goes down, and the fierce heat has [534] given place to the welcome cool of the evening. Then you will hear the music of reed pipes, and looking up you see a long line [513] of sleek, solemn cows, with large silken dew laps, and fat humps, slowly coming up the village path lowing for their calves, while boys ride on their backs sitting or standing upright, balancing themselves carefully and blowing on their pipes. Before and behind them runs a troop of goats and sheep bleating with such a human cry. In a moment the village is alive—sheep and goats are chased back and forward till they find the huts where they sleep with their masters. And boys run out with wooden pails [234] into which they milk what the calves have not sucked from their mothers.